

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please substitute the following claims for the same-numbered claims in the application:

1. (Original) A method of authorizing access to an item, said method comprising:
receiving a presented password from an entity desiring access to said item;
comparing said presented password with a stored password;
authorizing access if said presented password exactly matches said stored password;
denying access if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password;
variably incrementing a lockout count if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password; and
locking out access to said item if said lockout count exceeds a predetermined value,
wherein said variably incrementing process increments said lockout count different amounts depending upon how closely said presented password matches said stored password.
2. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 1, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein, in said variably incrementing process, said lockout count is incremented a lesser amount as said presented password matches said stored password more closely and is incremented a greater amount as said presented password matches said stored password less closely.
3. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 1, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, further comprising determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by evaluating whether the difference

between said presented password and said stored password relates to typographical errors.

4. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 1, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, further comprising determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by classifying the difference between said presented password and said stored password into different types of password errors.

5. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 4, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said different types of password errors cause said lockout count to be incremented by different values.

6. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 4, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said types of password errors comprise missing characters, extra characters, transposed characters, and incorrect case usage.

7. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 1, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said denying process allows additional passwords to be presented and said locking out process prevents additional passwords from being presented.

8. (Original) A method of authorizing access to an item, said method comprising:
receiving a presented password from an entity desiring access to said item;
comparing said presented password with a stored password;
authorizing access if said presented password exactly matches said stored password;
denying access if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password;

variably incrementing a lockout count if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password; and

locking out access to said item if said lockout count exceeds a predetermined value,

wherein said variably incrementing process does not increment said lockout count if said presented password is the same as a previously presented password that was entered within a predetermined previous time period.

9. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 8, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein, wherein said variably incrementing process increments said the lockout count different amounts depending upon how closely said presented password matches said stored password, such that said lockout count is incremented a lesser amount as said presented password matches said stored password more closely and is incremented a greater amount as said presented password matches said stored password less closely.

10. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 9, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, further comprising determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by evaluating whether the difference between said presented password and said stored password relates to typographical errors.

11. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 9, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, further comprising determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by classifying the difference between said presented password and said stored password into different types of password errors.

12. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 11, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said different types of password errors cause said lockout count to be incremented by different values.

13. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 11, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said types of password errors comprise missing characters, extra characters, transposed characters, and incorrect case usage.

14. (Currently Amended) The method in claim 8, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said denying process allows additional passwords to be presented and said locking out process prevents additional password from being presented.

15-35. (Canceled).

36. (Original) A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by said machine to perform a method of authorizing access to an item, said method comprising:

- receiving a presented password from an entity desiring access to said item;
- comparing said presented password with a stored password;
- authorizing access if said presented password exactly matches said stored password;
- denying access if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password;
- variably incrementing a lockout count if said presented password fails to exactly match said stored password; and
- locking out access to said item if said lockout count exceeds a predetermined value,

wherein said variably incrementing process increments said lockout count different amounts depending upon how closely said presented password matches said stored password.

37. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 36, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein, in said variably incrementing process, said lockout count is incremented a lesser amount as said presented password matches said stored password more closely and is incremented a greater amount as said presented password matches said stored password less closely.

38. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 36, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said method further comprises determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by evaluating whether the difference between said presented password and said stored password relates to typographical errors.

39. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 36, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said method further comprises determining how closely said presented password matches said stored password by classifying the difference between said presented password and said stored password into different types of password errors.

40. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 39, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said different types of password errors cause said lockout count to be incremented by different values.

41. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 39, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said types of password errors

comprise missing characters, extra characters, transposed characters, and incorrect case usage.

42. (Currently Amended) The program storage device in claim 36, all the limitations of which are incorporated herein by reference, wherein said denying process allows additional passwords to be presented and said locking out process prevents additional passwords from being presented.